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DEPARTMENT FOR DRL A/S LOWENKRON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: OPPOSITION AND RULING PARTY INCH
TOWARDS DIALOGUE

REF: BAKU 63

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: During the December 2006 visit of Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Barry

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Lowenkron, the opposition and ruling party leaders agreed that they were prepared to engage in a new political dialogue focused on implementation of Azerbaijan's international commitments. The parties have yet to take any major steps toward such a dialogue, although in recent discussions, party leaders insisted that their positions have not changed. We have consulted with the leaders of all the major opposition parties and the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, and based on those consultations, developed a set of recommendations for an open political dialogue, which we believe will be best organized and moderated by OSCE Baku. The Ambassador relayed these suggestions to the new OSCE Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Jose Luis Herrero Ansola, who agreed to consider catalyzing and leading a political dialogue. Open dialogue between the political parties is key to Azerbaijan's democratic development, and we will continue to engage with the party leaders and the international community to encourage such a dialogue. END SUMMARY

ADP CALLS FOR DIALOGUE, CREATES A STIR

12. (C) Almost two months after agreeing to a political dialogue in a December 19 dinner with visiting DRL A/S Lowenkron (see reftel), the opposition and ruling party leaders - while insisting their positions have not changed - on their own initiative, have yet to take any major steps towards such a dialogue. Sardar Jalaloglu, Acting Chair of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP), has openly invited the GOAJ to participate in a political dialogue, but Jalaloglu seems to be more focused on his own political ambitions than the prospect of a real dialogue. Jalaloglu's public comments on the matter triggered widespread speculation that ADP is changing its political orientation from opposition to pro-government, in turn causing rumors that ADP will split from the opposition Azadliq bloc. Azadliq leaders Ali Kerimli and Lala Shovket told us that this speculation stems from internal problems within ADP, but that ADP has assured the bloc that it is not changing its political orientation. Jalaloglu confirmed that the party is not changing its orientation, rather, ADP is trying to take a more constructive approach than in the past - which he said was triggered by A/S Lowenkron's comments on democracy at the December 19 dinner. (NOTE: ADP has long been rumored to have deep internal problems, caused by factions within the party. Jalaloglu has now made public his intention to run for ADP Chair in the party's May summit. Current ADP Chair Rasul

Guliyev, who is reportedly residing in New York under political asylum, has yet to announce his own candidacy.)

YAP IS STILL THINKING...

13. (C) Executive Secretary and de facto Chair of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) Ali Ahmadov told us on January 29 that while YAP is still open to the idea of a dialogue, the party is currently busy organizing its regional conferences. According to Ahmadov, these conferences are important because they will be the last prior to the October 2008 Presidential Elections. Ahmadov stressed YAP's position that the topics to be discussed should be important to the public, so that people will understand why the ruling party is engaging in such a dialogue. He also said that YAP is still considering with which party a dialogue would be beneficial, because, according to Ahmadov, the opposition has a limited and rapidly decreasing number of supporters. Ahmadov did not see the point of discussing the issue of freedom of assembly, because, he said, "the opposition can have rallies whenever it wants," referring to the GOAJ's decision to allow Musavat to protest the price increases on January 28. He also pointed out that the ruling party initiated the last dialogue with the opposition, and said that "having a dialogue is better than not having one." (NOTE: After the arrest of the three Yeni Fikir youth movement leaders on coup-plotting charges, YAP announced that it would not be part of a dialogue that included the Popular Front Party (PFP), which effectively ended the process.)

...WHILE THE OPPOSITION WAITS FOR LEADERSHIP

14. (C) On January 31 PFP Chair Ali Kerimli told us that the party still supports the idea of a dialogue, and feels that

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sooner is better than later. Kerimli repeated what he said at the December 19 dinner: that the dialogue would be best centered around discussing the GOAJ's international commitments - like those with the OSCE and the Council of Europe. In addition, Kerimli would like to address domestic policies; he feels that the GOAJ has made certain progress with its foreign policy, and needs to do the same internally. This includes political prisoners, freedom of speech, and political pluralism. Kerimli said that the opposition is ready for a dialogue, but that the GOAJ is not, and has only agreed to it to appease the international community. He recognized the need for a mediated dialogue, and requested the Embassy to play the role of mediator. Kerimli said that OSCE Baku mediation would suffice, but that attention from Washington would "raise the stakes." If OSCE Baku were to mediate, Kerimli stressed the importance of avoiding "past mistakes," referring to the format of previous roundtables conducted by OSCE Baku. According to Kerimli, the YAP representative should be authorized to speak on President Aliyev's behalf - someone such as Ali Ahmadov would be better than Member of Parliament Mubariz Gurbanly, whom the ruling party often designates to interact with the opposition.

15. (C) Musavat Party Chair Isa Gambar told us on February 1 that the party is ready for a dialogue on any topic, with no pre-conditions. He said that the opposition is ready, and is waiting for the GOAJ to initiate the discussion. Gambar said that a moderated discussion was acceptable, but that he requested the Embassy, rather than OSCE Baku, to moderate the discussion. According to Gambar, the best discussion would include a limited number of participants to prevent the dialogue from turning into roundtable discussions that lacked substance and results. He also thought it best to have a predetermined agenda, so that all parties are clear on what the dialogue would entail. Gambar feels that the two most important issues to discuss are the composition of election commissions and television access for opposition members. Other possible topics he would like to include in the

dialogue are freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and political prisoners.

¶6. (C) On February 2 Azerbaijan Liberal Party (ALP) Chair Lala Shovket told us that the party still supports a political dialogue, noting that it is crucial for Azerbaijan's democratic development. Shovket emphasized the importance of not having dialogue just for the sake of talking; she wants to see action rather than just words. Shovket wants to discuss topics centered around Azerbaijan's international commitments, such as political prisoners, media freedom, and political pluralism. Referring to President Aliyev's comments at a January 22 Cabinet of Ministers meeting, which was open to the press, that "the opposition smells like mothballs," Shovket noted that civil behavior between the interlocutors will be key to the dialogue's success. She said that international mediation will be necessary; that the Embassy would be the best mediator but that OSCE Baku would work as well, although she warned that the GOAJ does not take OSCE Baku seriously. Shovket also noted the need for the GOAJ to come to the table ready to make changes, for which it would have to set concrete dates.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Open dialogue among the political parties is key to Azerbaijan's democratic development. It is apparent, however, that an honest broker will be needed to bring the parties together and facilitate their engagement. The arrival of a new and well-qualified OSCE head of mission offers an opportunity. Based on meetings with leaders of the major parties, the Embassy developed the following suggested framework for talks, which the Ambassador offered to newly-arrived OSCE Ambassador Herrero Ansola as a nonpaper on February 9. Herrero Ansola agreed to consider catalyzing and leading a dialogue.

Begin text of Embassy Nonpaper:

- Equal representation of ruling, independent and opposition parties (including the truly independent blocs), with no more than 10 to 12 individuals sitting at the table.
- Strong representation by and leadership from the international community, preferably the OSCE, in close coordination with member states.
- A closed-door environment which expressly prohibits participants from publicly commenting on anything but the final outcome of the discussions.

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- A clear, agreed vision outlining the purpose, agenda and timeline of the dialogue.
- The overarching purpose of the dialogue should be to create an atmosphere of trust among the parties, with the ultimate goal of expanding the political space and leveling the playing field.
- The initial discussions should focus on very concrete, attainable goals that are agreed upon in advance.
- Possible early topics could include the current Council of Europe list of political prisoners; freedom of assembly; and social issues.
- Later, more difficult topics could include freedom of speech and composition of the electoral commissions.
- The GOAJ must make clear its support for this dialogue. At a minimum, the ruling party must be represented by someone empowered to make decisions on behalf of the GOAJ. Ideally, someone from the President's Office should attend the opening

session of the dialogue.

The Embassy will continue to engage with the political party leaders and the international community to encourage an open dialogue, and will report on substantive developments.

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